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SUBJECT: TIP: COORDINATED MEKONG MINISTERIAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRAFFICKING DISCUSSES SUB-REGIONAL ACTION PLAN IN BEIJING

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Summary

¶1. (SBU) At the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking (COMMIT) Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) and Inter Ministerial Meeting (IMM) in Beijing December 12-14, delegates from Burma, Cambodia, China, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam discussed regional cooperation and coordination on trafficking in persons issues and highlighted the steps their respective countries have taken to implement the Sub-regional Plan of Action (SPA). Ministers from the COMMIT countries signed a Joint Declaration committing to work together to implement the SPA and emphasized the importance of consulting civil society and victim representatives in national and regional plans to combat trafficking. End Summary.

¶2. The Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking (COMMIT) Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) and Inter Ministerial Meeting (IMM) were held in Beijing December 12-14. PolOffs attended as observers.

SOM Reviews National Activities

¶3. At the SOM opening ceremony, Ministry of Public Security Vice Minister Zhang Xinfeng praised the role of COMMIT in fighting trafficking in persons and outlined two objectives for the Beijing COMMIT meeting: review each country's progress in implementing the Sub-regional Plan of Action (SPA) and discuss planning for the next SPA phase. UNDP Country Director Subinay Nandy emphasized a victim-centered, rights-based approach to combating trafficking, saying this is the "very heart" of the COMMIT process. Following the opening remarks, officials from each COMMIT country briefed on the steps their respective countries have taken to implement the SPA. Highlights from each country's report follow:

-- Burma: Burmese officials said Burma established an anti-trafficking unit within the Burma Police Force, developed bilateral MOUs with Thailand and China and sent officials to various trafficking-related training programs. They noted that Burma's National Action Plan and implementation plan are awaiting review and approval by the cabinet and described as a "milestone" the enactment of an anti-

trafficking law that criminalizes "all forms of trafficking." The Burmese officials said a Border Liaison Office dedicated to trafficking was opened with China at Muse.

-- Cambodia: Ministry of Women's Affairs Secretary of State You Ay said Cambodia established a new national taskforce to implement bilateral and multilateral MOUs for the elimination of trafficking and created a National Leading Working Group led by the Deputy Prime Minister to oversee the implementation of all anti-trafficking activities. She described training programs attended by government and NGO officials. Between January and November 2007, police conducted 101 trafficking-related operations, arresting 55 offenders, she stated. In August, the Council of Ministers approved a new draft law on the suppression of human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

-- China: Ministry of Public Security (MPS) Criminal Investigation Department Director General Du Hangwei emphasized China's new MPS Office for Preventing and Combating Crimes of Trafficking in Women and Children and China's National Plan of Action (NPA). He stated that the NPA is China's first national anti-trafficking document and will be implemented by twenty-eight government agencies. He described a number of anti-trafficking awareness campaigns that took place in China. Du said Chinese government officials attended several trafficking-related workshops and noted that China is developing pilot projects to improve assistance and recovery for victims.

-- Laos: Police Department Deputy Director General Kiangkham Inphengthavong said Laos's National Plan

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of Action is being finalized with help from the Netherlands and will be completed in early to mid-2008. He described several training programs for Laos officials and bilateral efforts with Thailand to combat trafficking.

-- Thailand: National Center on Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Director Rarinthip Sirorat said Thailand tasked the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security to implement the SPA and set up a national inter-ministerial COMMIT task force. Sirorat noted that a pilot program established to identify and trace missing persons has been extended for another four months (until January 2008) following an internal review. Thailand also passed the Act on Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking which includes men in the definition of human trafficking. The law was passed on November 28 and is expected to be enacted in April 2008.

-- Vietnam: Ministry of Public Security General Department of Police Deputy Director General Nguyen Hoa Binh reported that Vietnam made efforts to bring its definition of "trafficked victim" into agreement with international standards. Vietnam and China conducted campaigns to combat trafficking along their mutual border, and Vietnam and Thailand negotiated a draft agreement on combating trafficking in persons that is expected to be signed in Hanoi in early 2008.

¶4. During a question and answer session for delegations and NGO representatives (that was closed to the press), anonymous, written questions were addressed to all delegations, although Burma responded to nearly every question. The Burmese

delegation said (in response to various questions) that Burma supports including Malaysia in future COMMIT meetings, intends to work with as many UN agencies as possible on trafficking, plans to include youth in policy planning and supports the role of NGOs in the fight against trafficking.

¶5. On December 13, the second day of the COMMIT, which was closed to Embassy observers, delegations discussed the outcome of the Mekong Youth Forum, the second phase of the SPA and a draft Joint Declaration.

IMM: Joint Declaration Agreed

¶6. On the COMMIT meeting's last day, during the Inter Ministerial Meeting, ministers provided brief remarks on the COMMIT process. The session included a keynote address by China's Minister of Public Security Meng Jianzhu. Meng announced that the PRC State Council had approved China's National Plan of Action to combat trafficking and said the plan will be made public in the near future. He stressed the importance of COMMIT countries improving repatriation procedures, but said legal issues and security concerns remain obstacles to this process. He noted that integrating trafficking victims back into society is a significant challenge. UN Resident Coordinator Khalid Malik stressed the relationship between poverty and trafficking, saying "the fight against human trafficking is also a fight against poverty." Malik said political will from the highest levels of government is crucial to combat trafficking. In their five-minute remarks, the ministers all reiterated their country's commitment to COMMIT and regional efforts to combat trafficking in persons.

¶7. The Joint Declaration, which each minister signed at the conclusion of the IMM, reaffirmed COMMIT's commitment to combating trafficking in persons in the region, included a provision emphasizing the importance of consulting civil society and victim representatives in national and regional plans for combating trafficking and pledged to place the rights of the individual at the center of policy and law. (Note: A copy of the Joint Declaration was sent to EAP/CM.) An International Labor Organization official told us the Joint Declaration's mention of civil society and victims in national and regional plans is an important

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development that he is pleased to see. (Note: NGO views on the COMMIT will be reported septel.)

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